

The literary reputation of Aldous Huxley, the novelist, has scarcely ever been as good as that of Aldous Huxley, the essayist. In fact, as some critics claim, Huxley's novels have the crucial flaw of not being proper novels at all - they are (the critics say) 1 actually essays, some of them more skillfully dramatized than others. Whether the novels really suffer from their essayistic quality is a question to be answered by the reader; certain it is, though, that mixing the two genres, the novel and the essay, was Huxley's intention: As he once acknowledged in an interview, his aim as a novelist was ~to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay"z.

What are the main features of a Huxleyan essayistic novel?

First, it is scarcity of plot. In most Huxley's novels nothing ever happens: people come and go, they meet and part, they (try to) make love, and - most importantly - they talk.

This is, of course, true especially of Huxley's early conversation novels, a late novel like *Ap e and E s s en c e* probably being the most noticeable exception.

Another aspect of the essayistic novel follows on the first. The scarce plot does not lead to any overall des i g n ; the novels end, as it were, in the middle of 'action'; there seems to be no single 'message' to be arrived at. Again, this aspect goes for the early novels; from *Eye l e s sin G a z a* onwards, there seems to be a (more or less) single idea driving the action.